

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 005550

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON NEW TLFC COMMANDER

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: The Ambassador encouraged General Buyukanit to discuss ways to improve our Army-to-Army relationship when the latter sees USAREUR CG General Bell in October. Buyukanit suggested that both sides made mistakes in the attack helicopter tender and expected the next time the GOT would utilize a "simpler model." For Turkey's assumption of command of ISAF next year, TLFC is planning to send a large corps headquarters and up to two reinforced battalions plus perhaps a brigade headquarters. Buyukanit hinted that canceling future years' Toros exercise on Cyprus might be difficult, and suggested that support for a settlement may be waning in northern Cyprus due to the international community's disappointing response to the Turkish Cypriots positive vote on the Annan Plan. The general thought Iran was a "crazy country," and expressed concern over developments in Kirkuk. Buyukanit appeared to be already thinking about issues he will face if he assumes command of TGS in 2006 as most observers expect. Engagement with him will be important for the future of our security relationship. End summary.

Improving Relations

¶12. (C) The Ambassador congratulated General Mehmet Yasar Buyukanit on assuming command of the Turkish Land Forces Command (TLFC) when he called on the general September 24. Army CSA GEN Schoomaker was looking to identify a time when he might invite Buyukanit to visit the US, he added. The Ambassador said he understood Buyukanit would be attending the October 5-7 Conference of European Armies where he would see USAREUR CG GEN Bell who would welcome thoughts on how to improve our bilateral Army-to-Army relationship.

Transformation and Modernization

¶13. (C) The Ambassador raised military transformation and asked Buyukanit for his thoughts, particularly in light of the cancellation of the tenders for attack helicopters and other systems. Regarding the attack helicopter competition, Buyukanit noted that he had worked on that project for five of its six years during assignments in Ankara. In July, 2003, as he was leaving the Turkish General Staff (TGS), there had been an agreement on a new model for the project and he had hoped that Congressional notification would occur in September. He suggested both sides had made errors that derailed the project, although he complained of hearing that with every proposal from Bell, the price went up. He and the Ambassador agreed that the failure of that procurement effort was a pity for both sides. Buyukanit said the new request for proposals (RFP) would utilize a "simpler model." TLFC had finished working on the RFP and had sent it to the Turkish General Staff (TGS) for final review. In response to a question, the Ambassador confirmed that the USMC's AH-1Z program was still on track, despite rumors to the contrary. ODC Chief Maj.Gen. Sutton urged that Turkey consider the pros and cons of the Foreign Military Sale system and direct commercial sale. In one recent case, a country discovered FMS to be considerably cheaper than DCS.

¶14. (C) On TLFC's hope for a new main battle tank, Buyukanit cited two reasons for this program's initial failure, price and the co-development requirement which only the Ukraine was prepared to meet. Now, Turkey plans on applying the technology and know-how it is acquiring through its M-60 upgrade program with Israel to the development of a new tank. A foreign partner would still be needed, he said, to provide whatever portion of the tank that Turkey still was not able to do itself.

¶15. (C) The Ambassador noted that American defense equipment was the best in the world and his job included encouraging Turkey to buy American products. Beyond the quality and commercial considerations, however, was the strategic interest of both countries in having their militaries transform in ways that preserve interoperability. In an earlier meeting with the Undersecretary of Defense Industries, the Ambassador recalled making the point that excessive source code demands threatened to exclude American firms from competing. Buyukanit understood, noting that even Israel had refused to release the technology for a few key

components of the M-60 fire control system. Buyukanit and the Ambassador agreed on the need for transparency, goodwill and open communication to resolve problems related to these types of programs.

ISAF Command

16. (C) The Ambassador expressed appreciation for Turkey's offer to lead ISAF again beginning in February 2005. Buyukanit said that TLFC was planning on deploying a reinforced headquarters element that is "much larger" than the typical corps headquarters. While no decisions had yet been made on what other forces Turkey would send, TLFC was planning on either one or two reinforced battalions plus "maybe" a brigade headquarters that could command the Turkish battalion(s) plus other countries' forces. He worried that NATO was not planning to hold a force generation conference until November, which he thought would be late for forces to arrive by February. On funding, Buyukanit said that the GOT was working on what support might be received from NATO and what would be covered by national contributions. Regardless, "there will be no problem," he said.

Cyprus

17. (C) The Ambassador said the USG was grateful that Turkey and Greece had agreed to cancel their fall exercises on Cyprus this year. Buyukanit responded that, "as a soldier, exercises are necessary." Ankara recognized that now was a sensitive time, but soldiers must exercise. Regarding measures to reduce northern Cypriots' isolation, Buyukanit thought the measures to date were disappointing and impacting on Turkish Cypriot public opinion. The pro-solution camp was losing support, he said, because they have received nothing for the positive vote on the Annan Plan. The Ambassador noted that the US was providing \$30 million in aid directly to northern Cyprus and taking other measures to ease the north's isolation. He offered to provide a list of these measures. Buyukanit lamented the continued lack of direct flights. The Ambassador explained that there were many legal issues involved in direct flights, including some with ICAO. While direct flights to/from the United States would not be commercially viable, some code sharing arrangements might be possible.

18. (C) Buyukanit thought the UNSYG report on Cyprus was "not perfect, but not too bad." The Ambassador noted that the lack of Security Council action on the report would likely be discussed by the Secretary and FonMin Gul in New York. On that and the UNFICYP renewal, the Embassy would remain in close contact with MFA, he told the general.

Iranian Nuclear Ambitions

19. (C) Turning to Iran, the Ambassador asked Buyukanit why a country rich in oil and gas needed to develop nuclear power, let alone the entire fuel cycle, and whether a nuclear-armed Iran was a concern for Turkey. Buyukanit responded that Iran's nuclear program was a concern for the entire region. The Ambassador asked whether Iran was continuing to take action against the PKK/Kongra Gel as it had on the eve of PM Erdogan's recent visit to Tehran. Buyukanit said that when it came to fighting the PKK/Kongra Gel, one must talk not only of Iran but also Syria and Iraq. "Iran is a crazy country. It poses a big threat for the region." Tehran has supported the PKK/Kongra Gel for many years, he continued, with terrorists staying in Iranian barracks near the Turkish border. Many people say Turkey has an important geostrategic position, he observed; "I hate it." It would be better if Turkey were farther north, he mused, rather than surrounded by the Caucasus, Iran, Syria and Iraq. The Ambassador noted that the Iranian threat was not only from potential nuclear weapons, but also from increasingly longer ranged missiles. Buyukanit responded that the "ideological threat" was greater than the proliferation threat. Al Qaida and others "are mad," he said. "If they had WMD, they would use it." He thought Iran would be a good place to "impose moderate Islam."

Iraq: PKK, LNOs and Kirkuk

10. (C) The Ambassador informed Buyukanit of the recent demarche by Embassy Baghdad to the IIG on taking action against the PKK/Kongra Gel. In addition, the Embassy was encouraging MFA to be more active in engaging the IIG. Our Embassy in Baghdad was prepared to help. But getting accurate information on developments in Iraq can be a struggle. The recent operation in Talafar demonstrated the value of getting real-time information to prevent problems.

In that case, reports from the TFO's liaison officer (LNO) to the Turkish Special Forces, COL Rollinson, were invaluable. He understood that the Turkish LNOs on the ground were a bit frustrated at the time it took to get into Talafar to see the situation for themselves. Having LNOs actively engaged improves transparency and reduces misunderstandings. Buyukanit agreed.

¶11. (C) Buyukanit asked about developments in Kirkuk. The Ambassador stated that no forceful change in the ethnic balance in the city should occur. There was a property restitution process that, although slow in getting established, should work transparently and on a sound legal basis. The US understands Turkey's concerns about how potentially dangerous the situation in Kirkuk could be for Iraq's future, he added.

Comment: In Command and Preparing for Command

¶12. (C) Comment: Buyukanit was extremely pleasant and engaging during this one-hour meeting, as he had been during the Ambassador's call on him last May at First Army headquarters in Istanbul. He has been commander of TLFC for only four weeks but already appears in command of not only the Land Forces but also Turkey's national security issues; this is not surprising for a former Deputy Chief of TGS and the heir apparent to succeed GEN Ozkok as TGS Chief in 2006. His comments indicate he is already thinking ahead on the issues he will face then:

--On Cyprus, suggesting future difficulty in canceling exercises on the island as disillusionment with the international response to the positive referendum vote grows.

--On Iraq, Kirkuk (the only Iraq issue he raised) is clearly his barometer for Iraq's future.

--On Iran, a realistic view of the regime, its intentions and the dangers it could pose with nuclear weapons, both conventionally and unconventionally, unusual in Ankara.

High-level engagement with Buyukanit could permit us to help him refine his thinking on these issues and others of importance to us and shape how our relationship develops in the future. End comment.

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